A Sportsman's Bag

Linda Edwards

WW/20

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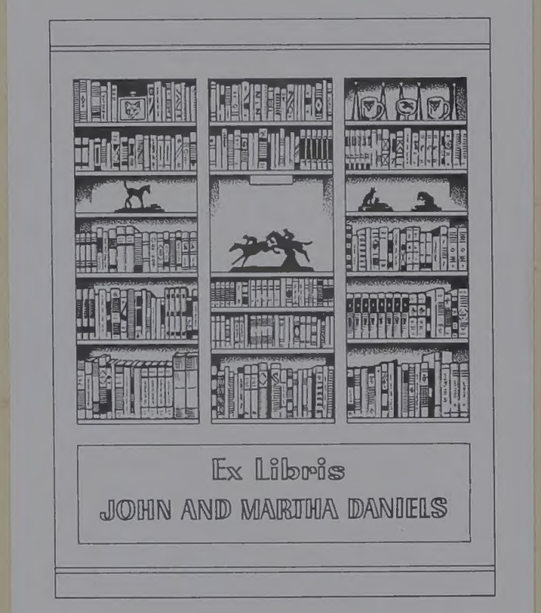
One of 100 signed [1920]



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A SPORTSMAN'S BAG

This edition is limited to 100 *Autographed Copies, in which each plate is signed by the artist, numbered* 1 *to* 100, *and* 550 *unsigned copies, numbered* 101 *to* 650.

No. Forty one.

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Published by Country Life, Tavistock Street, London

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A LIST OF PLATES

I. IN THE BADMINTON COUNTRY (*His Grace the Duke of Beaufort, M.F.H.*)

II. CUBBING IN THE WOODLANDS

III. THE KING'S HIGHWAY

IV. ROUNDING TATTENHAM CORNER

V. THE CHALLENGE (*Exmoor*)

VI. WATERS OF LETHE

VII. A HUNT STEEPLECHASE

VIII. THE LAST CHUKKER

IX. EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY STABLES AT HOLNICOTE

X. PARTRIDGE SHOOTING

XI. A MOORLAND GALLOP

XII. DOWN THE WATER (*Devon and Somerset*)

XIII. A DEVON STREAM

XIV. A HIGHLAND FUNERAL

XV. HIND HUNTING—BACK INTO HORNER (*Devon and Somerset*)

XVI. NEARING THE END

XVII. HOUNDS AT EXERCISE

XVIII. HIND HUNTING—THE MORT (*Stoke Coombe, Devon and Somerset*)

Dedicated to my best friend

A PRELIMINARY CANTER AND A COUNTING OF THE BAG

By CRASCREDO

THERE are people who take a gloomy pleasure in making untidy collections of evidence to prove our decadence as a nation. For such people it must be terribly distressing to examine the state of sport in England to-day. We have no religion, trade, enterprise, or idealism—but our sport, which could scarcely exist without these other things, remains as sound as any bell.

This is true of all our field sports, but there is, in any case, a connecting link between them which enables us to judge them as a whole. There were once two Varsity Blues—of different bluedom—who were worrying themselves about that periodically alleged decadence of Oxford University in athletics. "Well," said one, beginning to tick off the items on his fingers, "we lost the principal event of all." "We *won* the principal event of all," objected the other. "By ten lengths," said the first man, ignoring the interruption. "By six wickets," corrected the second. But the men who follow sport are not interested in making such distinctions, and, even if they were, it would not help them much, for the field sports as a national asset must stand or fall together.

In spite of the Dismal Geordies, the majority of us are satisfied to believe that our sport and our national character are developing side by side, and showing a remarkably healthy growth. From the point of view of the sportsman's bag we needn't be too particular in defining just what we mean by sport. After all, the most pedantic of hunting men, shooters, or fishermen will agree that the sportsman can, for instance, bag a day's racing if he wants to without requiring a special licence to do so. Besides, the substantial shade of John Jorrocks is seldom absent when men sit in judgment on sport, and we are all mindful of that unfortunate occasion when the great man verged upon inebriation, and Strider squinted furiously, and someone threw a dish-cover at J.J.'s

head. It is a sufficient warning against any inclination to glorify our particular favourite among the sports at the expense of those of other people.

But if few men since Jorrocks' day have been rash enough to attempt a definition of sport, many have had a cut at defining character. Character "gives splendour to youth": it is "a thing that will take care of itself"; it is centrality, "the impossibility of being displaced or overset." And it is higher than intellect. To suggest that sportsmanship may be higher than intellect might provoke a comparison with bats in the belfry, which fly higher than the house; but to deny that sport is a character-builder would be to throw open the belfry to the bats.

The men themselves, who follow sport, do not attempt to defend or justify it in this or in any other way—except (and unconsciously) by their own example. Even when the daily papers give us unpleasant details of a hunting run which ends in the slaughter of a beaten fox thrown from a back bedroom (a hideous finale which is apt to occur in one hunt or another every season, with unfortunate regularity)—even then the men of sport are not usually among those who reply to the indignant letters which appear in the papers of the following morning. Perhaps they are stricken dumb quite as much by their own disgust that such things should be inevitable as by their horror at the language used by the reporters in describing the foregoing run.

But to those of us whose faith is feeble there is something a little alarming about this indifference of the sportsman to criticism and hostility; for if sport were ever to lose its hold and influence upon the nation, is it certain that the sportsman himself would survive? If the English sportsman did not survive, it would be in the nature of a tragedy for England. To put it at its lowest, we all know Englishmen of whom we may say that if they didn't hunt, or couldn't shoot, or were not fishermen—as the case may be—they would be much more unpleasant fellows than they now are. It is even possible that many men say it of us. While to put the claim at its highest is to make a list of those, our acquaintance, who, having passed through the "splendour of youth" (without perhaps noticing anything very splendid about it), have acquired a certain centrality—an air of it being impossible to overset them—which makes them very good men in a tight place, leaders of men at those exciting times when leadership has become an uninsurable risk. It may be disappointing that it should be part of the character of these men of sport that they allow the clever people to think they are without intellect, but it can be mighty comforting,

in the day of battle or in a crisis of the nation's affairs, when clever ones are two a penny, to find yourself with a leader whose heart is as strong as his head.

We must not overstate the case. If the past years of potted history have taught us nothing else they have shown that the most "unlikely" leaders of men are sometimes the most likeable of all; but I think they have shown, too, that the most *natural* leaders of men—and therefore the leaders who require least training at the expense of a nation—are these men of the field sports. It seems to me a vital matter that the supply of them should be maintained. In days of peace or in those almost legendary periods of trade and industry to which, with a creditable optimism, we still apply the word "normal"—in such times as these, you and I will allow almost anyone to lead us by the hand, if not by the nose. I cannot really answer for you, of course, but for myself, as representing some part of a tenth decimal point in the nation's population, I say this—that while, with a cheerful idiocy, I will allow myself to be led up the garden by a scholarly politician or a brief-glutted barrister, I will only do so for as long as we are *in* the garden. When we get outside, into the places where everything is no longer lovely, I and the other decimal points begin to look about us for leaders of another kind; and the men we are looking for are those who, something slow of speech but very sure in decision when a nation stands at a parting of the ways, have lived close to nature and listened to her voice.

For these are men who have acquired their learning in a hard school: privation, discomfort, hunger, thirst, and danger—all these, if in pleasantly small doses, are a part of the sportsman's experience and go to form his character.

It is not necessary that we should sob ourselves to sleep at the thought of the hard life of the sportsman, but if we are to appreciate its worth, it is desirable for us to remember that sport does hold this element of hardness. The fact that a sportsman, in order to end his misery, has only to get off his horse, or to put his gun or rifle down a rabbit-hole, or chuck his rod into the river, can only make it the harder for him when, under every provocation, he refrains from doing any of these things.

You, I presume, have grown up into a tremendously strong-willed and hardy person; it is, no doubt, never now a temptation to you to cut away early on a wet day out hunting, or to refuse with oaths that further climb—uphill, through knee-high heather—to which your stalker grimly invites you at just the moment when you feel that your legs are finally telescoping into your body. But you will not deny that even your hardihood of to-day is a thing which could not have reached its present perfection, but for the miseries of your splendid youth—if you had never been compelled to remain out ferreting while your fingers, nose, and toes were blue with cold; if you had never had to go without your meals in order that you might fail to catch the very large trout; if, in your holidays, you had resisted that sickening impulse to put your pony over the biggish stake and bound with a drop on the farther side—then you would be of notably less value to England and to me than you now are. For (and this is the point) while a street-bred people will in time of war or crisis suffer danger, hardship, hunger, and thirst heroically, they will not at first meet these miseries as if they were the most natural things in the world. If we have always caught the nine o'clock up train and trotted home at six (I notice it is nearer five nowadays), or if our recreation has seldom taken us beyond the reach of a nice tankard of bitter, or two poached eggs on toast—then it is not too much to say that, when the call comes, we shall, at first, lack certain qualities which are essential to leaders of men. A nation, therefore, requires for its security and well-being an immediately available supply of these already half-trained men, schooled in the fields of sport.

I have been looking at the thing from the point of view of the rest of us; but have you, yourself, at the end of it all, gained nothing—or nothing more exhilarating than our assurance that, if we are so unfortunate as to set the country's house on fire, you will be one of the first people we shall send for? It is for you to say, of course; but the rest of us may venture on a guess or two, counting in advance a sportsman's bag for him at the end of the day.

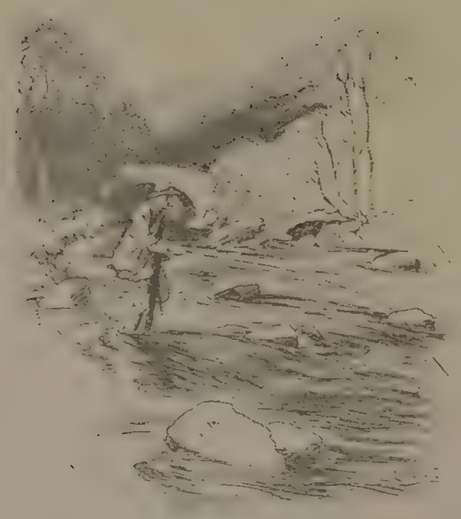
Looking at his bag, it seems to me that Mr. Lionel Edwards, for example, on the next moor to ourselves—if I may so put it—appears to be having about as jolly a season as a man could wish for. I want you to understand that I have never met Mr. Lionel Edwards. I once travelled 76¼ miles to meet him (I get my figures from the ABC), and spent the worst part of twenty-four hours looking for him; it was a source of pride and comfort, as well as of horror to me, as I

trundled back over those seventy-six (and a quarter) miles, to have learnt, just before I came away, that he must have spent a full twenty minutes of the *previous* twenty-four hours looking for *me*. But this unfortunate contretemps makes it the easier for one to take a detached, if cloudy, view of what it is in sport which Mr. Lionel Edwards is capable of showing us. I think it is—almost everything.

Few of us are able, ourselves, to paint pictures of the things for which we care, but we don't much want it done for us unless a man is pretty good at the job; and for this reason those who attempt it must, I think, make up their minds to do so under the growling threat of the crowd to which I belong—"*Aut Cæsar aut nihil!*" Without venturing on a list of sporting artists whom we in the crowd have unanimously elected to our Nihilist Club, I should like to record that we have always acclaimed the artist of this book as Cæsar. So far from telling him that he must return on a stretcher or not at all, we come to the end of his book, and, mindful of this and other things he has done to make us happy, we salute him, singing to him in our untuneful way, "Will ye no' come back again?"

For what is it that these pictures enable a sportsman to do? To look at a sportsman's bag? That would be very interesting and jolly, no doubt, but it would not be completely satisfying to a sportsman. The secret of the pictures is, to my mind, that they enable a sportsman to count *his own* bag. Horner and Stoke Combe—these will not even be names to some sportsmen; Exmoor itself and Tattenham Corner may be very little more than names; while to a few among us, simple souls, the very fact that the pictures should have names at all may prove a little distracting. "Waters of Lethe?" queries one such who, having forgotten his Greek, rhymes the word with teeth, with a queer effect as if he spoke of a dentifrice. "Now where would *that* be? I don't seem to remember the name." But the fact will not bother him unduly. Within a few seconds he will be turning the pages again to have just one more look at the Exmoor "Challenge" before continuing to count his own bag in the light to which the artist has led him.

A lesser artist than this could have reminded many sportsmen of the chief items of their own bag: a Devon and Somerset season, that extraordinarily successful holiday in Scotland two years ago—why, a photograph would have done it as well or better. But the pictures in this book, with the mists and the soft colours and the sea beyond it all, bring back to the mind of a man

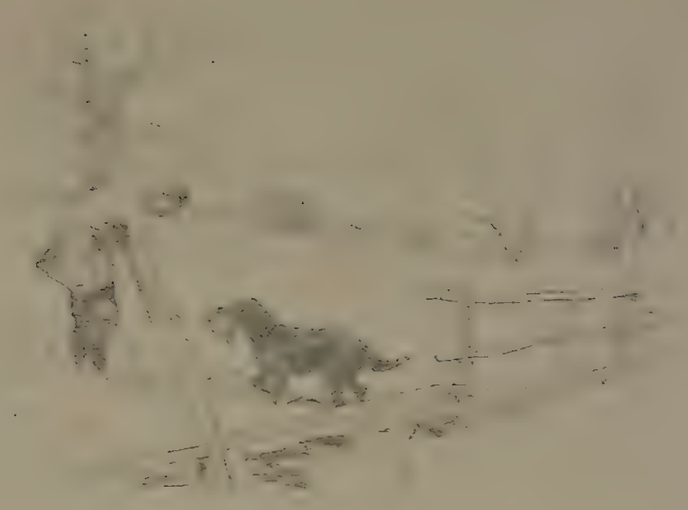


everything that has gone to make up his day's sport—each item under the heading " Various," which, like the woodcock or occasional snipe of a game book, has distinguished one day from another.

Now if we say that the appeal of these pictures is to a much wider circle than that of the experts in sport, this is very far from suggesting that the expert will fail to appreciate them. In every one of the pictures there are technical details the wrong presentation or the slurring-over of which would have ruined the thing from the expert's point of view: the " Highland Funeral," " In the Badminton Country," " The Last Chukker "—these are all instances in which faulty presentation of details would cause an expert to shut the book in a fit of screaming hysteria. This is not because the expert is a pettifogging person, but because, whether it be a question of rifles or rods, saddlery or clothes, there are certain accepted standards and styles which have come to be accepted, not for fashion-plate reasons, but because they give results. Although we may not always appreciate why it should be so, it is only pictures that satisfy experts which are capable of stirring the memory of those of us who live in the wider circles of the all-round sportsman.

To talk of an " all-round sportsman " seems to conjure up one of those Fat Boy persons who make our flesh creep with boredom in listening to their personal reminiscences and their endless " shop "; but most of us are all-round sportsmen in the sense that, while expert in none, we have had good times in all the field sports. There are probably, for example, not many hunting men who have never known the thrill of that interval between the long blast of the keeper's whistle and the whirr of wings above your head as the covey divides and passes swiftly over, protesting in the face of doom. And there can be but few shooters who have no pleasant memories of trout streams and salmon pools, of those places where a certain quality of peace in their setting tends to make it a matter of comparative indifference to the all-round sportsman when, like others before him, he has " caught nothing."

It is, perhaps, the fishermen themselves who are the least likely to seek a share of other men's sport in return for sharing their own; but put a picture such as the " Hunt Steeplechase " before those of us who are fishermen, and we shall soon satisfy you that the fisherman is not so cold-blooded as his fish. It is, indeed, when horses come into sport that all sportsmen find a common meeting-ground, and that to sport is added just that dash of danger which gives its flavour to the dish. In pig-sticking the danger flavour is of one kind, in polo of another; the all-round sportsman may never have had the time or the money or the necessary degree of horsemanship (a requirement which he is apt to overlook) to play polo, nor the opportunity to stick a pig—but every sportsman feels he could have done it if he had had the chance, and knows he would have liked to try.



The same applies to steeplechasing, but flat-racing is a different matter. Here the all-round sportsman may feel that things are getting a bit beyond him: he is content, as it were, to watch other men dropping the birds which go to swell his sportsman's bag. The artist has shown us flat-racing at its greatest, and he has chosen what is, to my mind, the supreme moment of all. Indeed, it always seems a pity that it doesn't take longer—say half an hour longer—to round Tattenham Corner. As it is, within a few seconds the situation will begin to grow too acute for anybody to be able to enjoy it. And five minutes later that year's Derby will have degenerated into a matter of pecuniary loss about which most people will be seriously—and some people noisily—annoyed. A horse's name (but not the horse) may be remembered with varying inexactitude for the next two years; the owner's will be forgotten until the time comes to write up his obituary notices; the jockey's name may be famous for twenty-four hours, but the trainer will never be known at all, so far as the majority of the public is concerned. This is all very unfortunate and disturbing, but at Tattenham Corner it is galloping horses alone which matter —thundering feet, and whiz, whizz, *whizzz* as they speed upon their way. If only it would last for half an hour, so that we might get our fill of this picture of light and colour, speed and power!

But there is always, of course, the risk that what the red-cap jockey at Mr. Lionel Edwards' "Tattenham Corner" is saying to the primrose jacket would not bear repeating for a full half-hour.

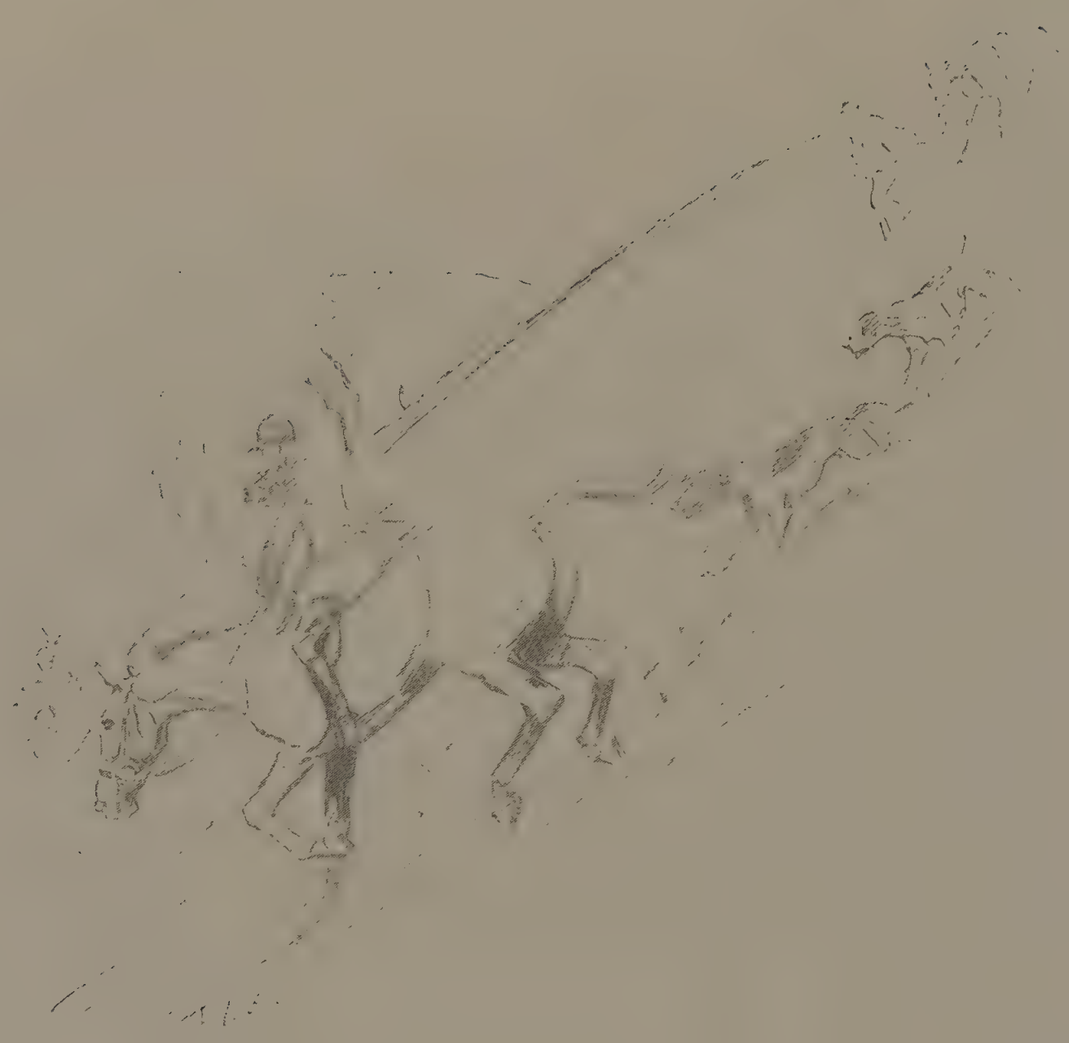
From Tattenham Corner to the stables at Holnicote is a far cry, but to see it pictured is to realise that here is one of those places where sportsmen can meet most happily and pause to count their bag. And from Holnicote they can look out upon that West Country where the things which belong to our peace and our sport are perhaps in the safest, surest keeping of all. For it is a country where, particularly in the hind-hunting months, a man gets the impression that here is a place where Englishmen will always have room to move, to breathe, and, if they wish, to dream.

It is a country which forms a noble setting for the stag—who lives there as he fights, and when his hour strikes, dies—a king of the beasts, in the tradition of a lordly heritage. The mere number of his kills or catches will hardly affect the reckoning of his bag by the sportsman, except in so far as those last moments of his quarry have left him with pictures, some of which he could do without. If there is generally something of magnificence about the death of a stag, the end of a hunted fox is, too often, a rather miserable business. We all know that if we didn't hunt the fox he would either be permanently dead or grown for the value of his pelt, and the second alternative, at any rate, seems not one which would be likely to attract the fox himself. But the fact remains that he weighs about twelve pounds, and that the odds are not in his favour. If he died always in the open, swinging round in that last stride to get at the throat of the leading hound

—that would not be so bad (except, of course, for the leading hound). But he doesn't. And a sinking fox, shambling along, draggled, spent, and weary, is not the same thing as the 'thief of the world,' "falling like one of the princes." "Nearing the End" is most certainly a part of the sportsman's bag, but it is pleasant for a sportsman to be able to turn from it to the light and movement of the "Moorland Gallop"—or to end his day on "The King's Highway," wondering whether the person in that motor-car is one who is capable of appreciating the quiet beauties of the countryside in winter and at night.

For if a grand event such as a right and left at driven partridges helps to give splendour to youth, it is not alone on the thousands of birds brought with skill and cunning to his friends' guns that the mind of the old sportsman dwells at the end of the day. The calling of partridges from the evening stubbles, mists that made the mountain tops islands of delight, salmon in the pools full of leaping life, and the wet wind beating in your face as the big horse catches hold—these are things numbered among the "Various" at the end of the sportsman's day.

And it is, I am convinced, largely because of the importance he attaches to the "Various" total that while the old athlete is, too often, nothing more than an old athlete, the old sportsman generally remains to the end of the day a real old sportsman.



PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN

IN THE BADMINTON COUNTRY

(His Grace the Duke of Beaufort, M.F.H.)

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CUBBING
IN THE WOODLANDS

IN THE WOODLANDS
GARDING

THE KING'S HIGHWAY

THE KING'S HIGHWAY

ROUNDING TATTENHAM
CORNER

GORNER
ROUNDING TATTERNHALL

Lionel Edwards

THE CHALLENGE

(*Exmoor*)

THE CHALLENGE

(Exmoor)

WATERS OF LETHE

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A HUNT STEEPLECHASE

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EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY STABLES
AT HOLNICOTE

EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY STABLES

AT HOLKHAM

PARTRIDGE SHOOTING

PARTRIDGE SHOOTING

A MOORLAND GALLOP

A MOORLAND CHALOP

DOWN THE WATER

(Devon and Somerset)

(Down the Sound)

DOWN THE WATER

A DEVON STREAM

A DEVON STREAM

A HIGHLAND FUNERAL

A HIGHLAND FUNERAL

HIND HUNTING—BACK INTO HORNER

(Devon and Somerset)

(Please add postage)

HOOKER

HIND HOUSING BACK INTO

NEARING THE END

NEARING THE END

HOUNDS AT EXLEGH

Ronald Stewart

HIND HUNTING—THE MORT

(Stoke Coombe, Devon and Somerset)